Introduction

The Shifting Faces of Dance

On a sunny winter afternoon of early 2012, I sat in a house in East London and chatted with a Senegalese dancer-choreographer-musician as he showed me some of the moves he had created in the various dance troupes he used to belong to when living in Dakar. A laptop sat on a table at one end of the room, showing Senegalese pop music videos on YouTube. We sat on the floor and talked, him occasionally getting up to demonstrates steps with careful precision, his arms sweeping the air in broad, wavelike movements which reminded me of my own jazz dance years in Paris in the late 1980s. In earlier conversations we had established that we were close in age, and had listened to the same kind of American pop music in those days. This made it all the easier for me to imagine his trajectory. Now established in the UK as a successful performer and teacher of West African dances and drumming, he reminisced about his dancing days in Senegal with visible pleasure. As a boy in Dakar, he had shown an early gift in bodily musicality, and had joined the Casamançais theatre and dance troupe in which both his parents performed. But he also enjoyed the breakdancing competitions that were popular with the boys in his neighbourhood, and the evening dances organized by his parents' hometown association, where he loved moving to the sound of Cuban music. Later, *mbalax* replaced breakdancing as the favourite dance style among the youths of his neighbourhood, to the extent that he choreographed sequences for the TV dance competitions that became the talk of the town in the mid-1990s. Concerned with his reputation in the Casamançais migrant community, however, he remained loyal to his parents' troupe, where he fine-tuned his drumming skills. Nevertheless, the urge to try something new was strong, and he also tried his hand at contemporary choreography, taking part in contemporary dance workshops and working with an up-and-coming company. His wide repertoire of skills caught the attention of a visiting choreographer from the UK. By the late 1990s he was teaching drumming workshops and working with a dance company in London, travelling back and forth between Senegal and

various European destinations to teach and work with performers. This individual's trajectory draws out the main themes developed in this book: the making of mobile selves in urban Africa and beyond, the place of individual creativity in social transformation, the continuous importance of respectability and morality in the face of economic uncertainty, and the global circulation of performing practices.

More specifically, this book examines four interrelated dance practices in Dakar, Senegal: *sabar*, urban popular dances, neo-traditional performance and contemporary choreography. It is suggested here that exploring the range of interrelated, embodied practices people engage with, either simultaneously or at different moments in their lives, sheds light on the creative ways in which people use their bodily skills to negotiate their status in different social contexts, and to construct their sense of self. Performing and making dance are also about fashioning one's life and identity in the city, the nation and the world beyond. Drawing inspiration from Mbembe and Nutall's (2004) call to pay more attention to the complex aesthetics of African cities, this study is thus an impressionistic portrait of creativity and agency in a postcolonial city. It is also a conscious attempt to convey glimpses of the constructive, fun, and skilful dimension of social life in a modern African context, a much needed complement to the wealth of studies on violence and conflict dominating contemporary scholarship on the continent. Mbembe and Nutall (2004: 348) thus point to 'the failure of contemporary scholarship to describe the novelty and originality' of the African continent. In dominant historical and political scholarship, they say, Africa tends to be examined as 'a matter of order and contract rather than as the locus of experiment and artifice' (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004: 349). The study situates itself within the growing body of work that takes seriously the performative and the aesthetic domains of social life, particularly as they are embodied in music (Waterman 1990; James 1999; Askew 2002; Turino 2002; White 2008), dance (Argenti 2007; Edmonson 2007; Gilman 2009) and theatre (Barber 2000; Edmonson 2007). It is also intended as a contribution to the growing literature on the agency of African citizens in appropriating and creatively refashioning globalized practices, in this case individualized approaches to choreography.

This study also situates itself at the crossroads between social anthropology and dance studies. It draws the study of dance, both on stage and in social life, into an exploration of the key anthropological themes of self-making, gender, morality and social as well as spatial mobility. Its originality lies in the fact that it looks at the different ways in which people use their bodies in various domains of life, rather than focusing on a single genre. Here it is the movement *within* and *across* genres and techniques that is a central point of focus. This will be illustrated through a second vignette on a dance festival involving a multiplicity of genres.

Opening: Kaay Fecc, the 'festival of all dances'

Dakar, June 2003. By the entrance to the Maison de la Culture Douta Seck (MCDS), the state-owned cultural centre on the Avenue Blaise Diagne, three Austrians are struggling to stuff their filming equipment into a yellow-and-black Dakarois taxi. One of them, a woman, is a performer/choreographer. The two others are her

manager and her filmmaker. The choreographer has just attended a 'traditional' dance workshop as part of the Kaay Fecc dance festival, and is now heading off to the National Theatre to rehearse for her company's contemporary dance performance the same evening. The filmmaker has been shooting at the nearby Tilleen market for a documentary on the company's work in Senegal. I have accompanied them to serve as a translator, asking reluctant market vendors for permission to film. Most refused, and the filmmaker quickly realised that 'bagging' images of people in Dakar was less straightforward than he had imagined, even against payment.

Like thirty-two other groups, they are here for the second edition of the Kaay Fecc international dance festival, a biennial event initiated in 2001 by an independent group of performers, choreographers and arts organizers, with the blessing of the government. Of the thirty-three groups invited, twenty-one are Senegalese and represent the full range of styles performed on the local stages: neo-traditional performance (*ballets traditionnels*), contemporary dance, hip-hop and popular dances. Inside the MCDS, the festival 'village' is buzzing with activity. There are food stalls where women from the adjacent neighbourhoods sell liver sandwiches and *fatayas*, fish-filled fried pastries. Next to them, a group of young men is sitting making *attaya*, the sweet mint tea that has come to epitomize urban young men 'hanging out' whole afternoons on end amidst a lack of formal employment. A tall, thin man wearing his hair in long locks is strolling about and selling cups of *café Touba*, a spicy and fragrant Senegalese version of the powdery Turkish coffee. The craft stalls feature batik dresses, miniature buses and toys or decorative objects made of recycled cans, and Senegalese glass paintings (*suweer*). The Communication stall has rotating shifts of well-dressed young men and women in charge of receiving journalists and distributing programmes and information to festival-goers. A few steps from there, technicians are balancing on poles high up above the outdoor stage, setting up the sound and lighting for the evening's performances. The site is full of young people chatting, strolling about and rehearsing. It is in the evenings that dance performances attract huge crowds, especially since entrance is free. Though there is an overwhelming majority of Senegalese on the site, the performers come from several African countries as well as Germany, Austria, France, Canada and the US.

In the main building, an open workshop in Sereer dances, attended by some forty participants, has now given way to a contemporary dance session with Paris-based Cameroonese choreographer, Pier Ndoumbé. He will later do a training session for the disabled dancers of Takku Liggeey, a Mbour-based development association which also features a dance troupe. In the evening there will be a contemporary piece by Austrian, Editta Braun, and a neo-traditional piece by the troupe, Bakalama. The equally packed programme of the next day will feature more workshops, performances and a sabar event in Dalifort, a smaller suburb between Dakar and Pikine. There Papa Sy, one of the performers in the festival organization, has set up a contemporary dance company with teenage girls and boys who rehearse regularly in the schoolyard. Dalifort also has a neo-traditional troupe, the Ballet-Théâtre de Dalifort. For the sabar, a large circle of plastic chairs will be made in the main sandy alley, and sabar drummers will be brought in from an adjacent neighbourhood, for a fee. The festivity

will begin in the late afternoon, when the heat becomes bearable. Young residents and professional dancers involved with the festival will take turns to perform athletic sabar moves on the plastic sheet facing the seven drummers, who have set up their instruments on chairs at one end of the circle. Young people from both sexes will run forward, dance solo or in a pair and run back to the edge of the circle, charged with energy. At one point an adolescent girl dressed in a tight black top and fashionably slit white trousers will 'cut' her performance with a forward thrust of the pelvis, laughing before exiting the central space at full speed. The lead drummer will take a few steps towards where she stood, face her, and with his drumming stick in one hand, thrust his pelvis forward, too. The crowd will be laughing at the exchange. Later, in the fading daylight, the drummers will gradually decrease the tempo so that the older participants may come forward for their turn to dance. In the last twenty minutes or so, more mature women will come forward in pairs or several at a time, and execute perfectly-timed, but less aerial steps than the youths and professional performers who had dominated the first part of the event. Soon darkness will prevail, and this will be the end of the event. The lead 'speaker' will thank the drummers and the residents, for whom this event is unusual since half of the participants are not residents of the neighbourhood. The sabar and a couple of performances in the following days are part of Kaay Fecc's effort to 'decentralize' the festival to the city's poorer suburbs.

The MCDS, by contrast, is located at the heart of the Medina, one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Dakar. It is adjacent to the administrative and business centre, Le Plateau. Not far from the MCDS is a mosque marking the territorial and spiritual centre of the Lebu community, the original inhabitants of the Cape Verde Peninsula. There are several other mosques nearby, as well as St Joseph de Medina, one of Dakar's main Catholic churches. Almost every block in the Medina features a tailor's workshop. The neighbourhood is a tight-knit mesh of older urban compounds, single-storey houses with a square courtyard surrounded by a succession of rooms. Each room houses a household or a part of it, and most compounds are shared among several families. Dakarois housing has become unaffordable for many, particularly for young people and for families without migrants sending remittances from abroad. But for the nine days of the Kaay Fecc festival, the MCDS becomes an island of cosmopolitan activity, and Medina inhabitants occasionally drop in to see the free performances or the festival 'village'. This is what the Dakarois dance scene is about: a young, cosmopolitan, at times prosperous but also ephemeral, elusive milieu alternatively derided on moral grounds and valued as a route towards individual success. The Kaay Fecc festival reflects this milieu in all its vitality and diversity. But what is the connection between such aesthetically different forms of performance? How do the different genres relate to the ways in which young performers fashion their lives and their sense of selves?

My attempt to address these questions is informed by a number of interconnected anthropological themes, which include the relationship between moving bodies and self-making, gender and morality, and the interplay between performance and politics.

Moving bodies, self-making and agency

Following the fascination with subjective experience which grew out of a disenchantment with 'objective' social forms in anthropology in the 1960s, anthropological studies of the body have flourished. The reasons for the relative neglect of the body in the social sciences have been laid out very well in Brenda Farnell's (1999) review article. While phenomenological approaches have conceptualized the body as the locus of human experience,[1] a wealth of studies drawing on various anthropological traditions have looked at such themes as the body as a metaphor of society (Douglas 1969) or the locus of resistance (Comaroff 1985). Theories of performance and practice have been particularly helpful in moving on from earlier views of static bodies. Drawing on his earlier work on ritual and social drama, Turner (1982: 94) saw performance as the locus of human learning when he suggested that 'one learns through performing, then performs the understandings so gained'. Rather than separating staged performance from social performance, as was often the case until the 1970s, Turner saw the two as belonging to a continuum of presence and consciousness. A complementary approach is that of Bourdieu (1972), who built on Mauss's (1973 [1935]) earlier essay on the socially constructed nature of all bodily techniques to develop a theory of culture as transmitted through internalized bodily dispositions, or *habitus*. The work of these authors has been important because they have sought to address the perennial question of how human action produces diverse cultural practices. This is an issue that has yet to be fully resolved, perhaps because the contribution of disciplines outside the social sciences and the humanities is needed to improve our understanding of action. Meanwhile, theorists of performance and practice have established the notion that all culture is *embodied*. As Hastrup (1995: 90) puts it, 'there is no manifestation of the self outside the body, even if our senses and words help us project ourselves outward.'

Yet a dynamic perspective on embodied sociality remains elusive in anthropology. The body has often been regarded as a still object, as the recipient of illness for example, or as moving according to barely conscious dispositions, as captured in Bourdieu's (1972) notion of habitus. Much of what we do is neither entirely conscious nor entirely intentional, but in dancing we are intensely present (if not always entirely conscious), expressive, and often creative. Hastrup's (1995, 2004) reflections on performativity are useful to move on from the notion of habitus because she argues convincingly that the difference between staged performance and social performance is not one of kind, but rather one of awareness of the body's performative skills. In theatre, she says, performers are made aware of this difference through the 'projective space' that is the audience, whether actually present or imagined. For her, theatrical and other cultural performances are but 'variations of those "theatres of self", in which the motivated bodies act' (Hastrup 1995: 91). I found her analysis useful to capture the interplay between the dances of everyday life and choreographic production for the stage in Dakar. There is constant feedback between life and the stage, and people do not always make a clear distinction between the two. Indeed the bodily awareness Hastrup describes is often as intense in the dances of everyday

sociality, such as sabar events, as will be evident in Chapter 3. This recognition came to me as fieldwork progressed. Inspired by studies of multiple genres or performative practices in a single context (Stokes 1992; Ness 1992; Wulff 2007), I followed the trajectories of informants and tried to gain a sense of all the activities they engaged with. This provided me with insights into the relationship between life and stage that would probably have eluded me, had I focused on a single genre.

Also important is the recognition that the study of dance opens a window onto aspects of social life not easily accessible through discursive forms alone. As Wendy James (2003: 93) points out, 'what can be said in language does not fully match all that is going on in life'. It is not that dance contradicts the verbal; it is rather that they supplement each other, thus enabling us to 'see' different things about society. In his work on Kuranko initiation in Sierra Leone, Michael Jackson (1983: 338) remarks that 'bodily movements can do more than words can say', and adds that 'techniques of the body may be compared with musical techniques since both transport us from the quotidian world of verbal distinctions and categorical separations into a world where boundaries are blurred and experience transformed'. It is precisely the transformation of experience that is at the centre of this study. How, then, do we understand the relationship between the repeated act of performing and individual agency, or the capacity to act upon one's life and that of others? And what role does performance play in self-making?

Looking at questions of agency and self-making would yield little understanding of people's actions and motivations if one did not recognize that the notion of individual agency itself is culturally determined. As James (2003) explains, the idea that individuals ought to be free to act of their own free will is a modern construct, and is influenced by the human rights discourse. In many contexts however, this discourse coexists with ideas of limited human agency. Throughout the Senegambian region, the notion that individuals are rarely in complete control of their actions is widely shared (Sylla 1994). This is evident, for example, in sabar dancing and in therapeutic practices, such as the *ndëp*, where movement is understood to be motivated both by the dancer and by external forces invoked by appropriate drumming rhythms. Likewise, destiny is understood to be in the hands of the divine, but also influenced by the morality of people's actions. This means that in order to grasp how performing actions relate to self-making, one needs to understand how people perceive their own agency as performers. What, then, becomes the significance of globalized contemporary choreography, in which individual performers are expected to be in complete control of their movements and to draw on their personal experience?

Drawing on the work of Hastrup and others, I want to suggest that in a social context in which music and dance feature prominently in social life, as they do in Senegal, self-making happens to a large extent through innovation in choreographic performance. Not all innovations in bodily techniques lead to enduring change, however, and thus the way in which innovation fits with 'sedimented' cultural practices (Hastrup 1995: 88–89) is important. Innovation is more than superficial change if it leads to discernible transformations in the capacities of individuals to act upon the world. These capacities are not just verbal, they involve the whole person, and

exploring these may enable us to go further beyond the much contested Eurocentric mind-body duality. This study thus attempts to contribute to our understanding of the materiality of innovation in culture.

At this point, I should warn the reader that there will be a slippage, at times, between the notion of 'self-making' and that of 'social mobility'. There is a tension between the two that is left purposefully unresolved in the book. This is because I contend that social mobility is not, as the term is often understood, simply a matter of class. People do their best to put on new personas as they move across social fields, and therefore social mobility is often as much about constructing a new sense of self as it is about being accepted as a member of a new social category. But self-making is also closely linked to questions of morality, for the recognition of worthy membership in any social group involves a constant re-evaluation of a person's qualities within culturally defined moralities. Self-making, therefore, involves the actualization of morality, a process in which performance plays a central role.

Dance and morality

Since social acting is inseparable from an implicit morality (Hastrup 1995: 97), an important task in an ethnography of dance is to understand how different ways of performing may be associated with particular moral qualities, or with their absence. As Signe Howell (1997b: 4) reminds us, the challenge for anthropologists concerned with moralities lies in 'discerning the link between values which are derived from a larger metaphysical whole and actual behaviour and practices'. But how does one disentangle moral discourse from actual practice? Taken together, the papers in Howell's volume (1997a) suggest that one needs to look at specific activities that are meaningful to large groups of people within a single context. In Argentina, for example, Archetti (1997) found football to be an illuminating window into the moral codes of masculinity.

In Dakar, I suggest, dance constitutes a privileged window into the construction of gendered moralities and into the morality of social hierarchies. One way of getting to the heart of the matter is to look carefully at how different categories of people and institutions respond to different ways of dancing. Attempts at controlling dance are particularly illuminating because they are recurrent in modern human history. This is likely because dance carries an ecstatic dimension which often makes it unpredictable, and therefore potentially disruptive. Dance reminds us that as human beings, we enjoy the thrill of being together in ways that cannot be completely controlled. This may well be the main reason why world religions, in their attempt to impose a universal morality, have been consistently concerned with controlling dance. Establishing normative ways of dancing is not only an attempt to control people's bodies, it is also an attempt to define what acceptable behaviour is in relation to others, and to reflect on how moralities ought to be embodied. Looking at attempts to control dance over time and in a given context therefore illuminates changing ideas of morality. But people tend to challenge control attempts and normative practices, and therefore looking at the link between moral discourses and practice also involves focusing on 'active dissent' and what this tells us about 'reigning

orthodoxies' (Howell 1997b: 4). Ultimately, the social control of dance speaks to the enduring difficulty, for human beings, of making sense of the relationship between morality and embodied practice.

Helena Wulff's (2007) historically informed study of Irish dancing provides an illuminating instance of a top-down attempt to instil new ideas about morality through normative ways of dancing. Wulff suggests that stiffness in the upper body, a characteristic feature that is strictly adhered to in competitive dancing, may have come about in the late nineteenth century, at a time when Ireland was under English domination and 'Irishness' had to be defined against 'Englishness'. The cornerstones of this cultural project were Irish Catholicism, the revival of the Irish language, the collection of folktales and new ways of dancing. English had to be trumped, and it is likely that a stiff upper body was regarded as the expression of a high moral virtue. In other words, competitive Irish dancing became a way of embodying new ideas about morality at this transitional period in Irish history. Wulff shows how there was active dissent, too, in the ways in which people hid to dance following the Public Dance Hall Act, a ban on dancing outside licensed halls requested by the Catholic Church in 1935. This spoke volumes about the 'reigning orthodoxy' of the Catholic Church in twentieth-century Ireland, and how people related to it in everyday life.

The disruptive potential of dancing also comes to the fore in Jane Cowan's (1990) ethnography of celebratory practices in the town of Sohos, northern Greece. Looking at weddings and the formal evening dances of civic associations, Cowan analyses dancing in terms of gender relations, but questions of morality are implicit throughout the book. Dance, she suggests, is problematic for men and women in different ways. Male youths and men are expected to put aside their antagonisms, and unite in the shared pleasures of dancing and drinking until they reach the altered state of *kefi*. For men, this is legitimate because they are expected to assert themselves as individuals. The quarrels that occasionally break out, Cowan says, are therefore valued as evidence of men's 'liveliness' and as an expression of their attempts to assert or challenge their social status in the Sohohian order. Women, by contrast, are much more restricted in the kind of performance that is appropriate for them, and their dancing is usually interpreted in terms of their sexuality. Women are therefore forced to affirm their individuality in much quieter ways than men; for example, through their clothing, hair style and restrained dance movements. But men and women from different generations and social classes hold conflicting views on appropriate behaviour at dancing events, and tensions are always just beneath the surface even as people share the pleasure of dancing. Here morality is embodied in different ways for men and for women, and dance serves simultaneously to elaborate gender identities and to provide a space in which different views on embodied morality can be confronted with each other.

In Dakar, it is morality that is the stuff of everyday conversation whenever people discuss dance. Indeed as we will see throughout the book, concern with young women's increasing autonomy and confidence in the public space is very often expressed in the form of judgments on how their dancing affects their respectability.

When people lament young women's inappropriate suggestiveness in dancing, it is morality in society that is being discussed, often passionately. Gender and age hierarchies are clearly at stake here, even more so as Senegalese Islam has become a powerful source of moral authority in all areas of public life. The importance of tensions over dance styles in the Senegalese context becomes clearer if we keep sight of local understandings of embodied morality. Indeed, in Wolof-speaking Senegal, morality is expected to be embodied differently depending on the social category, or 'caste' status individuals are identified with. I will return to the Wolof caste-like stratification in Chapter 2, but for now, suffice to say that the higher the status, the more restrained body movement is expected to be. Restraint and measure are highly valued, and a person of good moral standing is expected to make little display of emotions in public (Neveu Kringelbach 2007a), and to show self-control by avoiding loud speech, expansive movement and unnecessary gesticulation (Sylla 1994). Though this is generally valued behaviour throughout the region, the expectation to confirm to this is higher for the 'freeborn' *géér* than for those who belong to a hereditary category of artisans or performers, the *ñeeño* (see Chapter 2). In other words, ñeeño are understood to share the same moral values as their géér patrons, but ideals of behaviour are different for the two categories. In this context, dancers who perform expansive, energetic movement styles put their moral standing at risk, particular if they belong to high-status géér families. Given that an increasing number of youngsters from such backgrounds are attracted to the performing profession, a key question running through this book will be the extent to which the success of the performing profession at home and abroad is transforming local notions of embodied morality. I now turn to the bodies of literature on popular culture and dance that have helped to make sense of the genres discussed in this book.

The open-endedness of 'popular culture'

The growing literature on 'popular arts' and 'popular culture' in Africa has informed this study in many different ways. I have been particularly inspired by Karin Barber's (1997) pioneering work across a vast array of genres. Stressing the difficulty of defining 'popular culture', which in Europe implies a clear-cut distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture, she argues that it is more productive to conceive of it as the 'vast domain of cultural production which cannot be classified as either "traditional" or "elite", as "oral" or "literate", as "indigenous" or "Western" in inspiration, because it straddles and dissolves these distinctions' (Barber 1997: 2). Barber's characterization of the popular arts in Africa is particularly useful in highlighting the novelty and combination of styles and genres that is often central to the practices of city dwellers across Africa. In Dakar, youth dances like the ever-changing mbalax genre fit well within Barber's notion: they are neither traditional nor elite but borrow consciously from the older sabar genre. Moreover, the youths who perform these dances in nightclubs, at neighbourhood events or in front of TV sets revel in their novelty. They draw on a mix of Wolof drumming rhythms, themselves refreshed through constant innovation above stable musical principles, and rhythms from Cuban, European, Brazilian, North American and Arabic origins.

Without taking the elite-traditional-popular distinction too far, Barber's conceptualization is also useful in enabling us to draw out the uses of various dance forms as modes of distinction. According to her, 'retaining the distinction between elite, popular and traditional allows us to investigate the important question of how present-day African artists and participants in art themselves conceive of their activity and its status' (Barber 1987: 20). The ways in which people conceive of their activity, she suggests, comes across in the conscious relationship artists maintain to ideas of 'tradition'. In Senegal, I suggest, dancers' reference to tradition serves to construct a respectable status for the profession in a context in which the reputation of the public performer is always fragile.

A further aspect is that the distinction between 'popular', 'traditional' and 'elite' performers is not as clear as one might think from looking at the various dance forms performed in the city. Like in Wulff's (2007) study of dance in Ireland, it is often the same people who move back and forth between different genres in the course of their lives, or simultaneously but with different degrees of intensity. For example, the same dancer may join in sabar events in her neighbourhood or perform mbalax dances in nightclubs for fun, while working professionally with a neo-traditional troupe. At some stage she may take part in a workshop in contemporary choreography, and move on to a contemporary dance company while still performing with the neo-traditional troupe.

Finally, I found that the social organization of popular dances in Dakar fitted well with Barber's (1997) observation that popular culture fostered new identities, new publics and new collectivities. In this study, I suggest that dance and musical performance in Dakar do conjure new forms of association, particularly a sense of simultaneously belonging to a neighbourhood, a locality of origin and a transnational world of artists.

The performance of nationalism and regionalism

In his introduction to an edited volume in honour of Abner Cohen, Parkin (1996: xxxiii) points to the 'metaphorical capacity for cultural performance to say things sideways' as that which wins people's adherence more powerfully than propositional arguments do. This metaphorical quality means that performance is capable of encapsulating a multiplicity of messages. It is therefore a seductive way of embodying national or regional identities since it is flexible enough to accommodate changes in their contents. For example, the fact that hometown associations from the Casamance region in Dakar express their distinctiveness through performance is not because the Casamançais dance and play music better than others, but because this enables them to celebrate their distinctiveness while discreetly including elements of the dominant Wolof setting.

Studies of musical performance, nationalism and ethnicity politics in Africa have informed this book (Waterman 1990; Askew 2002; Turino 2002; Edmonson 2007; White 2008). In her work on musical performance in Tanzania, for example, Askew (2002) eloquently shows how nation-building is a process of mutual engagement between the state and its citizens. Ever since the United Republic of Tanzania was

founded in 1964, one of its major challenges has been to bring together the islands (Zanzibar and Pemba) and the continental part of the nation into a unified whole. Music and dance were made to play an important role in this project, particularly through the patronage of a Swahili genre, *ngoma*, and the organization of performing competitions at a national level. Another popular music style, *taarab*, was side lined initially because it was considered foreign, and did not fit within the ideal of *ujamaa* socialism. But taarab was still performed during weddings and popular events, and was eventually co-opted by the state during the transition to multipartyism in the mid-1990s. Through historical sources, song texts and a rich ethnography, Askew shows not only how certain musical genres contributed to the emergence of a national identity, but also how the thriving presence of others showed the dissensions in state-led nation-building. Music expressed these tensions and provided musicians with a medium to reflect on them. It was in the songs and in the unpredictability of competitive events that the contradictions of nation-building were revealed, and Askew's ethnography of the musical scene helps to understand people's growing distrust toward the ruling party in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Away from Africa, Wulff's (2007) monograph on Irish dance demonstrates how several genres taken together (the traditional *sean-nós*, Irish Ballet, contemporary Irish dance, competitive dancing and commercial shows like *Riverdance*) enable people to explore the contents of 'Irishness'. Contemporary Irishness, Wulff suggests, involves both cosmopolitan mobility and a strong attachment to the materiality of the Irish land.

In Senegal, as in Tanzania and Ireland, the creation of a national identity remains an unfinished project. Despite a state rhetoric in which ethnicity is silenced ('ethnic' parties are forbidden by the Constitution), the southernmost region of Senegal, the Casamance, has suffered an armed separatist conflict since 1990. Though framed in a regionalist discourse, the separatist movement is led by Jola speakers (Foucher 2002), in a region otherwise linguistically, culturally and religiously diverse. Ironically, the neo-traditional performing genre that was championed by the state in the 1960s and 1970s has been most successfully appropriated by Casamançais groups. Thus, the genre that was created in order to help citizens imagine a unified nation (as well as establish President Senghor's moral leadership in West Africa) was appropriated as a vehicle of cultural distinctiveness, a goal not entirely opposed to nation-building but having the potential to undermine it. In the post-independence period, cultural diversity was valued as long as its representation remained controlled by the state. Today, however, it is in the hands of precisely those segments of the population that had been marginalized: Casamançais minorities, and to a certain extent ñeeño and people from other 'skilled' hereditary categories. The politics of artistic practices, then, shed light on the transformation of nation-building projects over time.

'Dance' and 'performance'

So far I have used the terms 'dance' and 'performance' almost interchangeably. This is meant to highlight the semantic challenge every study of dance is confronted with:

not only is the term 'dance' ambiguous, it also fails to capture the interplay between the different elements (oratory, poetry, song, music, movement) that is characteristic of many performing genres across Africa (Drewal 1991). Most dance scholars have come to acknowledge that it is impossible to come up with a universal definition of dance, even though, as Wulff (2001: 3209) says, 'dance anthropologists seem to converge on a consideration of bounded rhythmical movements that are performed during some kind of altered state of consciousness'. Dance anthropologists Kaeppler (1978) and Williams (1982) have refuted the idea of a universal definition, arguing that lumping widely different practices together obscured more than it revealed. Drawing on Saussurian linguistics (De Saussure et al. 1916), Rudolf Laban's (1970) movement theories, and in Williams' case on Ardener reflections on the anthropology of language (Chapman 1989), they have looked at 'structured movement systems' instead, and have analysed the semantic similarities in different practices within a single context.

Definition, however, is only part of the problem. An important challenge is to name very diverse practices so as to capture the way in which people experience them. The fact that many West African languages do not have a specific word for dance (Gore 2001) underlines the Eurocentric character of the category. Lassibille (2004) found that the WoDaaBe of Niger used three different terms to speak of dance: *fijjo* (play), *gamol* (dance) and *bamol* (dance or braid). In Wolof, dance is best translated as *fecc*, but this is not the most commonly used term. Rather, terms that designate a type of event or a genre are favoured. The term *sabar* for example, is used for a type of festive event, a range of drums, and a repertoire of rhythms and dances, with a recognizable structure and style. Style is indeed important to define a genre; one cannot, for example, dance sabar in a ponderous way. Gore (2001: 33) suggests that we should abandon the idea of isolating dance in culture, not only because this is 'conditioned by the deeply-ingrained Eurocentric habit of conceiving of art as compartmentalised and specialised practice', but also because this produces a discourse which devalues performance in 'socially and ritually significant contexts'. In practice, however, dance forms have often been ignored in studies of ritual, music or carnival, precisely because they were not seen to be interesting enough in themselves. I see no reason why dance should remain a substrate of another cultural form when participants obviously know how to distinguish it from other activities. As a compromise, I have therefore chosen to make generous use of the term *performance*, which refers to various genres, all involving codified movement, music, verbal arts, dress styles, and particular ways of using the space. My use of the term also draws on Schieffelin's (1998: 195) definition of performance as symbolic or aesthetic activities, and as 'intentionally produced enactments which are (usually) marked and set off from ordinary activities, and which call attention to themselves [. . .] with special purposes or qualities for the people who observe or perform them'. His definition has the advantage of drawing attention to the fact that performance is a conscious mode of action, for an audience (real or imaginary), and that it usually requires skills beyond those required for everyday activities. On the other hand, I have been conscious of only using the term 'dance' in contexts in which my informants do ('danse' in French or 'fecc' in Wolof).

Dance performances in Dakar, then, do not simply consist of movement and music. Barber's (2000; 2007) work on theatre and texts has been important in drawing my attention to the verbal and the textual, and from an initial focus on movement, I became gradually aware of the recurring references my informants made to language and to the world of theatre. Dance people often used terms like 'play' (*pièce*), 'text' (*texte*), 'theatre' (*théâtre*) and 'show' (*spectacle*). It was only when I started looking at the Senegalese dance scene in historical perspective that I discovered the strong connections with theatre. This, in turn, enabled me to see choreographic production as made of movement and sound as well as verbal, textual, spatial and material elements. This has been productive to uncovering the significance of texts to performers and audiences, of course, but also to shedding light on the exclusion of those without the literary skills to produce a 'text' explaining their artistic approach. In other words, focusing on different skills helps to uncover mechanisms of exclusion.

Finally, a crucial aspect of dance is that it is often intensely pleasurable to participants. The dry nature of academic writing makes it easy to forget that this is one of the main reasons why dance and musical performance are so powerful. I have written elsewhere about emotionality in Senegalese women's dances (Neveu Kringelbach 2007a), and to say that emotion is central to how dance 'works' does not imply that it is irrational. Indeed, recent research in the field of neuroscience suggests that emotions are an essential component of 'rational' thought processes (Kringelbach 2007). This actually supports what anthropologists have known for a long time. Parkin (1985), for example, attributed the universal power of performance to the 'moving together' of reason, emotion and body. A possible avenue to explore this further would be to look at the neuroscience of dance, but there has been little such research so far due to the difficulty of recording brain activity while people are dancing.[2] Throughout this book I attempt to draw out the sensual and enjoyable dimension of dance to show that such activities may well 'work' because they integrate human experience as a whole.

Attention to the ways in which people experience dance is also important to avoid seeing dance as nothing *but* the expression of something else. In his brilliant study of religious change, Sarró (2009: 4) has warned that 'the obsession with the liberating element of religion in colonial times risked [. . .] displacing attention away from the religious'. There is a similar tendency to focus on dance and music as simply reflecting social and political change. I suggest, rather, than it is more productive to think of these expressive forms as constitutive of society (Stokes 1997). I now turn to the existing literature on dance in Africa, to which this study contributes. I include scholarly texts as well as mainstream writings since both genres have shaped current perceptions on African choreographic practices.

Anthropology and dance in Africa

Although scholarship on African forms of performance has boomed in the last two decades, there remains a relative scarcity of studies on dance in relation to the ubiquity and social significance of choreographic practices. But the field is no longer as bare as when Margaret Drewal (1991) described dance as the least studied of all genres of performance in Africa, a state of affairs she attributed to the elusive

character of what is often an improvisational practice. As she rightly foresaw, video recording, and images more generally, have made the field more accessible. Another important development has been the engagement of anthropologists who were themselves performers, and were therefore able to learn new bodily techniques fairly easily. But this development was long in coming.

In early twentieth-century ethnographies of Africa, dance was often mentioned only in passing, as a component in ritual. An early exception was Evans-Pritchard (1928), who dedicated his first published article to the *gbere buda*, the Zande funeral beer dance. A few years earlier, Radcliffe-Brown (1922) had dedicated a chapter of his *Andaman Islanders* to the 'function' of music and dance, which he interpreted as maintaining social cohesion through the ecstatic feeling of belonging these activities generated. Evans-Pritchard (1928: 460) challenged this view in *The Dance*, arguing that ceremonial dances involved other aspects, too, that were not easily visible in any other social form: the socialization of children, the shared sociality of young men and women, local notions of leadership, and the conflicts resulting from the tension between 'individual vanity and passions' and the 'constraining forces of the community'.

Much later, Clyde Mitchell (1956) wrote a landmark study of the Kalela, a competitive marching dance performed weekly by miners in the growing towns of the Zambian Copperbelt. But the focus of the study was urban ethnicity, and Mitchell did not linger on choreographic description. Instead he focused on the dress styles, the songs and the region of origin of the dancers. Nevertheless, the study provided inspiration for later studies of performance in the region. Ranger's (1975) historical work on the *beni ngoma*, for example, was the first important account of social transformation over more than a century, as traced through the trajectory of a genre of dance. In colonial East Africa, the beni ngoma developed as a march dance and a caricature of European military parades. Ranger showed how the beni associations helped people maintain a sense of continuity with the older Swahili stratification, all while acting as an ironical commentary on colonial society. Further South, ethnomusicologist John Blacking (1967) drew on his fieldwork with the Venda of Southern Africa to suggest that music and dance were central aspects in the socialization of children, and that they expressed the group's creative potential.

It all also worth mentioning Robert Farris Thompson's (1974) *African Art in Motion*, one of the first serious attempts to grasp the social significance of dance in West Africa. Unusually for its time, the book features a wealth of photographs and still shots from video recordings. Thompson's concern is with the aesthetics of dance, particularly the shared principles between dance and sculpture, rather than with dance in interplay with other dimensions of social life. As a result this rich, fieldwork-based work appears as a compilation of the artistic canons underlying 'African performance', and does not always avoid the pitfalls of generalization. Nevertheless, Thompson's historically informed reflections on aesthetics and art criticism in West and Central Africa remain highly innovative.

It was not until the early 1990s that a significant body of work emerged on various practices in which dance and musical performance played a central role. Deborah

Heath's (1990, 1994) work on dance, verbal performance and politics in Kaolack, for example, was important in showing how gender relations, social status and political influence in post-colonial Senegal were constantly re-negotiated through women's dances and verbal performance. She described women's dances as a scarce resource which people put to various uses depending on the context, for example as a contrast to high-ranking men's reserve, and thereby status: 'the identification of women, as well as lower-caste male performers and their drums, with sexual expressiveness allows certain men to maintain their reputation for reserve' (Heath 1994: 95).

There is also a growing body of work on masquerade in West and Central Africa. Argenti's (2006, 2007) work, for example, places masquerade at the centre of generational politics in the Kingdom of Oku, in the Cameroon Grassfields. Tracing back centuries of violent history in the region, he argues that both local and national polities have marginalized the youth and women, and that these groups have appropriated older genres of masquerade performance to contest their marginalization. In the Grassfields, masquerades embody the memory of the slave trade and the subsequent violent history of the region. At a more general level, Argenti argues for the capacity of performance to maintain and challenge social hierarchies simultaneously. In the practices I examine in Dakar, I am less concerned with the embodiment of memory, but here too, innovation in performance is driven by the desire of marginalized groups (youth, women) to re-negotiate their social status through strategies of extraversion (cf. Bayart 1999).

Writing 'dance' in Africa

As I have hinted already, this study distances itself from popular perceptions of dance in Africa as the expression of timeless traditions. The objectification of dance in Africa since the nineteenth century has been dealt with by other authors, and there is no need to dwell on it at length here. In her book on the *jali* (praise singers) of the Gambia, for example, Paulla Ebron (2002) includes an excellent discussion of Euro-American representations of African music in the light of Mudimbe's (1988) work on the 'invention' of Africa. Also inspired by Mudimbe, Francesca Castaldi (2006) writes about the manner in which colonial representations of African dances were used as evidence of the 'primitive' nature of the continent's people. She traces the tautological argument through which nineteenth-century European philosophy classified dance as an irrational and 'primitive' activity, then held the omnipresence of dance in African sociality as proof that Africans were indeed 'primitive'. She also suggests that Senegal's President Senghor himself had internalized this view when he created the National Ballet of Senegal. The genre the troupe performed, Castaldi says, was underpinned by an evolutionary view of African arts, and an idealization of the modernization narrative of the 1930s to the 1970s. Senghor held dance to be the quintessential African art, but by framing it in this way, Castaldi concludes, he helped to reinforce existing ideas on the 'primitiveness' of African cultures.

These ideas should be understood in the context of a longer history of objectification of black moving bodies. Not only European philosophy, but also anthropology, travel writing, colonial texts and the colonial press contributed to orientalist

representations of African dances. These representations have created the illusion of a common spiritual and physiological basis in a diverse range of practices. By the time of the world fairs, the 'Hottentot Venus'[3] and other human exhibitions of the nineteenth century,[4] dances performed by Africans became conceived as the 'other'. As a result, writing on dance in Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has often crystallized the worst stereotypes on the supposed primitiveness of Africans. There is a wealth of texts in which this is evident, but a few examples should illustrate the point. The French colonial military magazine, *Tropiques*, thus published an essay by a respected psychiatrist, Henri Aubin (1951: 38), describing African dances as involving the body rather than the mind:

> The multiplicity of circumstances in which under-evolved indigenous peoples dance can be attributed to the fact that dance is a rather elementary activity: motor response, usually rhythmic, responding to stimuli where sensory and emotional data play the main role. Instead of being expressed through complex intellectual representations and a rich vocabulary, their emotional states become actions [. . .] of which dance is, after all, a privileged form.

Christian missionary writings also contributed to European representations of dance in Africa. In an illuminating review of missionary sources, Georgiana Gore (1999, 2001) notes that these texts often depicted dance as disgraceful, useless and indecent. In the French territories, missionaries encouraged the colonial authorities to ban dancing from public space for fear of temptation, and government anthropologists were not to write about dance in official documents. In Senegambia, Creole Catholic priest, Abbé Boilat, exiled to France following a dispute within the Church, published his memoirs in 1853 in an attempt to rehabilitate his reputation (Boilat 1853). His portrayal of regional dances as placing good Christian souls at risk is therefore predictable in this context. What is striking, though, is the similarity between his moralizing tone and some of the public discourse on popular dances in Senegal today. The following excerpt is taken from the section on the 'Moors' of Northern Senegambia, in which Boilat (1853: 370–371) describes evening dances held on gum trading boats on the Senegal River:

> Men and women dance separately; all their movements simulate fighting; but it is quite different with women: they, too, dance separately, and the young men come to watch; in general the movements they execute are most indecent. They form a large circle and each in turn enters the middle to dance while the others clap and sing in rhythm.
>
> The Negro women of the Walo do not remain indifferent to these pleasures; they embark with their *Griots* and drums and dance like the others, but in the manner of the Wolof who live on the edges of the desert. One easily imagines [. . .] that several [European] traders come to watch these evening festivities, where they forget the sacred moral duties and those of

> faithfulness in marriage. They soon choose concubines among these beautiful dancers who cost them many *ballots de Guinée* [colonial currency], quite apart from the numerous gifts they are obliged to provide them with.

In Boilat's account, although both men and women dance, it is the morality of women dancing that is called into question; they are the ones who tempt innocent European traders and cause them to be unfaithful to their wives. As we will see in Chapter 4, this is not very different from today's public discourse in Senegal, where young women dancing in suggestive ways are held responsible for the moral ills of modern society.

Travel writing has been equally prolific in the stereotyping of dance in Africa. In his West African travelogue, *Africa Dances*, Geoffrey Gorer (1935) refrains from adopting a moralizing tone, but often describes the dances he has witnessed as pure entertainment, and hardly the product of a creative effort. But Gorer's book was not as widely read as the European printed press in the colonial period, a medium which made the exoticization of African dancing bodies widely available to European publics. Writing on African performance was particularly prolific during world fairs and colonial exhibitions, and the reviews of the magnificent 1931 exhibition in Paris are a case in point. The exhibition itself was an oversized display of imperial splendour, and a tribute to the French 'civilizing mission', *la mission civilisatrice*. Ordinary citizens did not have many opportunities to travel to the French colonies, and to entertain the millions of paying visitors who came over the course of six months, real and locally recruited colonial 'subjects' were brought in to perform scenes of everyday life in their native regions. The purpose-built site at the Porte Dorée took the visitor through 'a décor of pagodas, Indochinese temples, African huts, Arabic minarets and great Sahelian walls' (Décoret-Ahiha 2004: 49, translated from French). During those months, the French printed press was full of lyrical reviews by journalists and intellectuals posing as enchanted travellers to unknown parts of the world. On 22 August 1931, French weekly magazine, *L'Illustration*, published 'L'heure du ballet', a special insert on the dance programme at the exhibition. The text was supplemented with eleven photographs and four drawings, and writer Paul-Emile Cadilhac (1931: 13) commented on the African elements of the spectacle:

> All the peoples gathered in Vincennes are dancing. For the past three months it has been nothing but festivities, circus games and music-hall. Framed by torches, magnificent and barbaric parades have wandered through the alleys of the Exhibition in the evenings, [. . .] and every nation, every protectorate, every colony wanted to have its festivities, every palace its ball, every French or foreign section its theatre, its stage, big or small, its seats reserved for the privileged few or given up to the crowds. [. . .]
>
> Africa appears as more direct, simpler, closer to the primitive instincts. Its drums, its sorcerers, its processions – from Behanzin to the king of the Mossi – have seduced the crowds and carried them away. Success was such

> that once a week the dances from West Africa, performed by indigenous riflemen, are now presented at the Cité des Informations by Commandant Décugis.
>
> But of all these events, the most beautiful, the most complete, was undoubtedly the series of five soirées offered by the Governor of French West Africa, Mr. Brévié, and Mrs. Brévié in their red palace at the Exhibition. [. . .] A white platform had been set up against a fountain in the central courtyard, bordered by chairs on three sides and dominated by the high tower decorated with the shapes and faces of gods. And the dancers from Ivory Coast appeared. Almost naked, wearing a loincloth around the hips and bracelets around the ankles, they were laughing, showing their white teeth. On their heads were feathers or some sort of savage headdress, and they were holding long lianas which they alternatively stretched and released. They danced, accompanied by tambourines and a kind of triangle. Then they gave way to the court of King Behanzin. [. . .] Drummers came in a procession: Bambara, Soussou, Mossi and the women dancers of Siguri, wearing red and blue pants. Everyone danced in their own fashion, the Dahomeans on a very marked binary rhythm and the Soussou in an epilepsy-like manner which set in motion the shoulders, the arms, the whole body. From time to time, on the side, isolated individuals performed pirouettes, somersaults and cartwheels.
>
> Meanwhile, the time of the Habbés[5] from Bandiagara had come. Naked above the waist, they wore a black tunic covered with thin plaited cords that looked like raffia. Their faces were hidden behind wire mesh masks. Small horns sat atop their heads, and in two cases also a sort of double swastika symbolizing the horns of the big antelopes of the bush. They performed for a long time, evoking through their cries, their calls, their songs, their gestures and their dances the wild beasts of Africa.

The performances are evidently new to the author, who does not quite know what to make of them. There is fascination with the flamboyance of the whole display and with the obvious popularity with the Parisian crowds. Cadilhac is also doing his best to show off his own erudition by naming ethnic groups and locations most French would not have heard of at the time. But there is also a running thread that is present in many texts from the colonial period: Africans dancing are portrayed as almost fused with the landscapes and the 'wild beasts' writers and readers alike imagine them to be living with. There is no place for either linguistic sophistication or elaborate choreographic work, and certainly not for urban culture.

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Africans dancing were thus constructed as driven by their emotions, their natural environment, and by mysterious forces outside the body, rather than individual agency and creativity. Ironically, as we have seen, this notion of limited human agency fits well with the perception of dance in certain contexts in Senegambia. The strength of this idea on both sides of the colonial divide may thus explain why it has been so enduring. This legacy of colonial

representations is still with us in popular perceptions, albeit phrased in a different language, as we will see in the course of the book.

There is also, now, a growing body of literature written by dancer-choreographers themselves (Acogny 1994 [1980]; Tiérou 2001; Sanou and Tempé 2008), as well as films on contemporary dance in Africa.[6] A productive way of dispelling the myth of 'African dance' is to look at the ways in which specific practices have been shaped over time. There are, of course, limitations to do with the lack of historical data, and the difficulty of writing about performance in a way that does justice to the way it is experienced by participants. We can only propose tentative avenues for thinking about the significance of performance.

Fieldwork embodied

The main part of the fieldwork for this study was carried out over twelve months between May 2002 and February 2004. Shorter trips totalling about four months followed between December 2005 and April 2011. I stayed mostly in Dakar but also took trips to the rail city of Thiès, Tubaab Jallaw on the coast south of Dakar, the Siin Saalum region and Saint-Louis. Much as I would have liked to spend time in the Casamance, the region was not easily accessible at the time of my main period of fieldwork,[7] and the fact that I had a small child in tow prevented me from embarking on long road trips. On the other hand, fieldwork came to extend beyond Senegal: I visited some of the performers I knew as they travelled to France and the UK, and attended the Ninth Edition of the African contemporary dance biennale (*Danse l'Afrique Danse*, formerly *Rencontres Chorégraphiques de l'Afrique et de l'Océan Indien*) in Johannesburg in September–October 2012.

One of the main difficulties in researching dance is that people who are not professional dancers have little to say about it beyond comments on individual skills or the morality of particular dancing styles. Anthropologists researching dance and other embodied practices have often remarked on this. On masquerade dances in the Cameroon Grassfields, Argenti (2007: 27) notes that 'the passionate, transcendent sensations of pleasure, pain, fear, and sorrow that are achieved by the dancers and their acolytes cannot be visited again in language afterwards'. Researching dance in Dakar, therefore, required some degree of practice.

Over the course of several months I took weekly classes in West African dances with Salif Mbengue, also known as Zale, one of the most experienced dancers in the Dakarois scene. I attended a four-week workshop in 'traditional dance' organized for over thirty professional dancers by the Kaay Fecc association in October 2002. This consisted of a three-hour dance training session every day, followed by an hour of 'theory' during which Massamba Guèye, an expert in Senegambian oral traditions, taught in Wolof on the local practices the dances used to be integrated with. The four weeks were divided into three parts during which different styles were taught by experienced dancers: Lebu dances (*ndawrabin* and *gumbe*), Jola initiation dances, and finally the Ivorian *zaouli*. There was live drumming by players from several dance troupes. The workshop, which turned out to be an excellent way of meeting dancers, ended with a final 'restitution' performance attended by friends and relatives, other young

dancers, and by Minister of Culture, Amadou Tidiane Wone. I also attended family ceremonies and neighbourhood festive events, but I rarely danced there, for although I learned the basics of sabar in dance classes, I found the dance circle intimidating.

I gained much more than a network through participation. Helena Wulff (1998) has written on how her background as a dancer had affected her rapport with ballet dancers. She noted that they could tell she had been a dancer from the way she watched them move. In my case, dancing with informants helped to legitimize my presence, and more importantly this enabled me to gain an experiential understanding of the local dance styles. In addition, taking up *djembe* drumming since then has given me a better grasp of the physicality of the rhythms. Being positioned as an apprentice, I also experienced how regional modes of apprenticeship differed from ways of learning how to dance in Euro-American settings. In this respect, it did help that I had extensive experience in various dance practices from studios in France, Denmark and the UK.

There was a lot of quiet watching, too, followed by mundane conversations. I had initially intended to focus on popular dances and hip-hop, but the serendipity of encounters decided otherwise. Early on, an acquaintance introduced me to a dance company, *La 5ᵉ Dimension*. I was intrigued by the combination of styles the dancers used, and they welcomed me to watch their rehearsals every week. Watching them at work, taking part in their informal meetings and having conversations with them turned out to be a important thread running through my fieldwork. Moreover the choreographer, Jean Tamba, had a long experience of the dance scene in Dakar, and his memories helped me to imagine what being a dancer between the 1970s and the 1990s must have been like. He was also one of the founders of the Kaay Fecc association, and the artistic director of the festival. In addition to the time spent with his company, I watched dance troupes rehearse at the Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor (CCBS)[8] a couple of evenings per week. One of the hearts of the choreographic scene in Dakar, 'Blaise Senghor' as the performers call it, is an aged, flat building with indoor and outdoor rehearsal rooms, a stage, offices and a small library. Dancers, musicians and theatre people hang out in the entrance hall every afternoon, and in the evening the building vibrates with the sound of loud drumming by three to five troupes rehearsing at the same time. I occasionally served as a photographer, snapping still and moving images of dancers at their own request, which gave me an excellent reason to be there.

Membership in the Kaay Fecc association early on enabled me to get glimpses of what was going on at the level of management and politics. I was part of the organizing team of the Kaay Fecc festival in 2003 and again in 2007, though the second time only for the duration of the festival. Fellow organizers included performers and choreographers, troupe managers, journalists, individuals with experience in the organization of events, stage technicians, and a secondary school teacher. Having previous experience as a festival volunteer in Denmark, I was in charge of recruiting and managing a team of about fifty 'volunteers', together with a visiting festival organizer from Ivory Coast. This enabled me to step into the role of a festival organizer, a position more tangible to most than that of an ethnographer.

Figure I.1 Soumbédioune, the Lebu fish market, seen from Fann Hock, 2002. Photograph by the author.

This was not my first visit to Senegal. I had spent several holidays there as a child and as a teenager visiting my Senegalese father and family, but my memories of Dakar were sketchy. I did, however, remember that the urban landscape used to be in a much better state and that the middle classes were better off in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I remembered the smell of fish, the fish market at Soumbédioune (Figure I.1) and empty beaches further north on the peninsula. I was surprised to see that a beach culture had developed in the meantime, with young people flocking to the sea at the weekends during the hot months. Smaller dance troupes without access to a proper space even rehearsed on the beach.

Through friends I came to live in the small neighbourhood of Fann Hock (Figure I.2), a fairly central location not far from the University and from the old Medina. From there I could easily catch a local minibus, a *car rapide*, or taxi to visit friends and informants across the city and its suburbs. In Fann Hock, people kept sheep in the sandy streets outside their homes, which the children washed with great dedication on Sunday mornings. There were mainly single-storey urban compounds in the 1950s style of the state agency SICAP (Société Immobilière du Cap Vert), though over the years more and more multi-storey buildings popped up. Sabar events as well as family ceremonies were held in the alleys from time to time. There were also *dahira* Sufi meetings on Thursday nights, with drumming and chanting well into the night. Loudspeakers made sure that the neighbourhood was momentarily taken over by the sound of prayer. I lived upstairs from a corner shop where neighbourhood youths met every day to chat, listen to Senegalese rap, make phone calls, watch the

Figure I.2 View of Dakar from Fann Hock in 2002. Photograph by the author.

girls, and sing the praise of their Sufi Muslim leaders, or *marabouts*. Next door to the shop lived a respected Jola traditional healer, whose courtyard was always filled with patients waiting from the early hours of the morning.

Friendships with other families in the neighbourhood meant that I was involved in circles outside the dance scene. Several friends worked for the local NGO, Enda Tiers Monde, and one of them introduced me to a cultural association in the dense suburb of Pikine (Figure I.3). The association was funded by a Belgian NGO with connections to Senegalese migrants in Belgium, and belonged to a sprawling constellation of associations that had benefited from the Senegalese decentralization policy launched in 1996. Their declared mission was to promote 'culture and the arts' in their district. When I told the first two members I met about my research, hoping to follow their work and attend neighbourhood events, they organized four afternoon-long group meetings for me to ask about dance practices in Senegal. I had not intended to carry out formal interviews at that early stage, but people were used to the principles of 'research-action' through their interaction with NGOs, and they expected me to follow the same model. These sessions turned out to be quite interesting. Although I sometimes felt uncomfortable with such a formal set-up, these were precious opportunities to discuss a wide range of issues, and not just performance. I came back regularly afterwards, spending most visits sitting and chatting outside the Women's Centre (often occupied by men) in this district of Pikine. These visits gave me insights into the world of local associations, many of whom were offshoots of the

Figure I.3 Views of one of Pikine's districts in 2003. Photographs by the author.

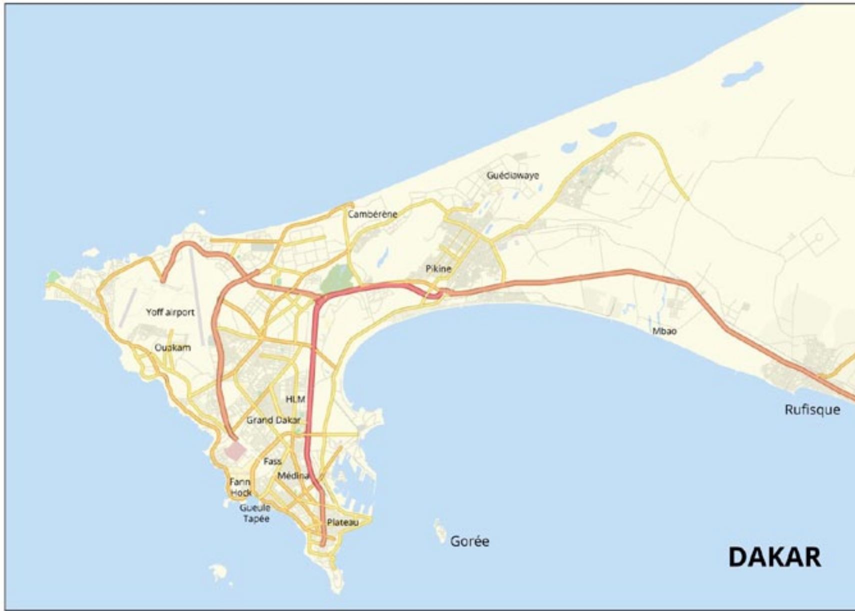

Figure I.4 Dakar and the Cap Vert Peninsula, with main fieldwork sites indicated. (Map created by ML Kringelbach using TileMill. © OpenStreetMap contributors).

ASC (Associations Sportives et Culturelles) movement, the youth sports and cultural clubs which I return to in Chapter 4. My fieldwork thus stretched over most of the peninsula (Figure I.4).

Though I started learning Wolof with a qualified teacher early into fieldwork, I was never fluent enough to conduct interviews exclusively in Wolof. Most of my conversations were in French, or in a mix of French and Wolof. On several occasions I relied on friends to conduct interviews with interlocutors who did not speak French, mainly women. But my linguistic limitations mean that my interactions were skewed towards people who had at least completed primary school. Nafy Guèye, a close friend with a keen interest in dance, introduced me to Lebu dignitary, Alioune Diagne Mbor, joined me at a few women dance events and helped to translate songs.

As a researcher, I worried constantly about 'giving something back' to the dance scene, and to key people with whom I spent time. This was all the more important as many informants were acutely awareness of exploitation issues. Thus the Senegalese NGO officer who introduced me to the association in Pikine did not hide the fact that he was deeply distrustful of the ethics of research in Africa by outsiders. As we waited for the two men to arrive from Pikine, he remarked in a sarcastic tone: 'I know how these things work, you know. You will do your research here, learn things from people and then you'll go back and be called an *expert*'. He then proceeded to tell me about an NGO-funded study trip he had made to Ivory Coast, during which a French 'expert' had lectured the African delegation on cocoa farming. 'Where had

he learned this, if not from Africans?', he asked. To him, this captured the unfairness of research structures on the continent. When the Pikinois arrived, he introduced us and explained what I wished to do. He then stood up and said he would leave us to 'negotiate', but not without telling the visitors that I was going to offer them a workshop in film script writing. I extricated myself from the situation by offering to give English lessons instead, but the visitors had a hard time believing that I had never written a film script in my life. The officer's tactics were obvious: by making a surprise offer on my behalf, he made it clear that I would have to 'give something back', although not necessarily in the form of cash. Over time I found ways of making myself useful by becoming involved in practical tasks in the dance world, designing a poster and a website for a company, helping people with CVs, English translations, etc. I also became less conscious of people's expectations as relationships grew into friendships, with their usual tensions and expectations.

Although most of the data for this study was gathered through fieldwork, I have also spent time doing archival work. I have consulted the archives of the 1966 World Festival of Negro Arts at the National Archives of Senegal in Dakar, and consulted Senegalese newspapers from the 1930s onwards, both in Dakar (at the Centre d'Etudes Supérieures des Techniques de l'Information, or CESTI) and in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale de France). I have also benefited greatly from Bob White's online database of newspaper articles on www.atalaku.net.

Finally, I have drawn inspiration from Jackson (1989)and Sarró (2009), both of whom highlight the importance of discussing ideas and writing with key informants. My three-week trip in April–May 2011 was thus dedicated to long hours of conversation with a dozen dance people about my book manuscript. I spent time explaining the contents verbally, since most of my informants were not fluent in English. In return, the feedback process yielded some of the most fruitful conversations I had had for years, and added a deeper layer to existing relationships.

Dance circles in an African city

Following this introduction, Chapter 1 places the study in historical context by tracing the history of public performance in Wolof-speaking urban Senegal, from the occupational trade of griots to a modern profession largely detached from traditional status hierarchies. It is suggested that the promotion of colonial school theatre, the cosmopolitan trajectories of the nationalist elites and President Senghor's patronage of the arts for political purposes were defining moments in the emergence of a profession with worldwide ambitions. These moments all fostered the emergence of new genres and new techniques of the body, which have paved the way for the current diversification in choreographic production.

Chapter 2 looks at the urban context in which this production takes place. Moving closer to the contemporary period, I focus here on the city of Dakar to show how the social transformations sketched in the previous chapter have provided young city dwellers with alternative routes towards social mobility. Since the Lebu from coastal fishing communities are regarded as the first inhabitants of the Cape Vert Peninsula on which Dakar sits, and since they have retained a strong discourse

of autochthony despite a recent history of diminishing land tenure, I also look at Lebu performance in the context of official ceremonies. I suggest that successful performance in a particular space symbolizes moral authority and the capacity to command the allegiance of others. In other words, successful performance embodies the widespread West African notion of 'wealth in people'. Finally, in this chapter I suggest that the appeal of the performing profession for youths from non-Griot backgrounds is fraught with tension because of the shifts it indicates in the location of status and power in society.

In Chapter 3, I begin to address the issue of self-fashioning by examining sabar dance events as a social space in which persons are gendered. Looking at the differentiated performance of sabar over the course of city dwellers' lives suggests that the genre serves in particular to help girls, and later women, to experience in their own bodies what being a social person at different stages of life involves. Although the genre is dominated by the presence of women, I suggest that it has to do with male personhood, too, but through a gradual absence rather than sustained participation. In this chapter I also focus on the spatial and choreographic structure of sabar events to argue that the genre embodies the tension between social conventions and individual creativity.

Chapter 4 focuses on the mbalax genre and other popular dance offshoots of the sabar as embodied practices through which young men and women use their skills to create new forms of sociality, and make the best of a situation of uncertainty and growing economic inequalities. Through the lens of state-sponsored TV dance competitions, the chapter also shows how a crucial dimension of post-colonial politics is the state's repeated attempts to co-opt youth movements and cultural practices in order to avoid disorder.

Chapter 5 explores the politics of neo-traditional performance, with a focus on the appropriation of the genre for regionalist, transnational and individual career purposes. This links in to previous chapters as I suggest that the practice of neo-traditional performance alongside dances in youth clubs and neighbourhood events, either simultaneously or at different life stages, helps city dwellers to make sense of their engagement with different moral communities. Moreover, neo-traditional performance has become an industry as well as being a cultural and political project, and this chapter thus examines the commodification of 'tradition'.

Chapter 6 examines the individualized genre of contemporary dance. The history traced in Chapter 1 is supplemented here with a focus on the recent emergence of a pan-African contemporary choreographic scene promoted by French and other European funding. The existence of a biennial pan-African choreographic competition since 1995, in particular, illuminates the circulation of the genre, which is best described as a creative process. But rather than the passive adoption of new choreographic techniques, the chapter also sheds light on the local appropriation of the genre for purposes of social mobility and self-fashioning.

Chapter 7 begins with reflections on the uses of notions of tradition in contemporary Senegalese choreography. It then moves a step below the general to focus on La 5^{e} Dimension, a contemporary dance company whose members have played an

important role in shaping the Dakarois choreographic scene. This is a group portrait which gives a sense of the creative process involved in the local contemporary genre, and shows creativity to be shaped by individual aspirations as well as local and global discourses on the role of the artist in society. The growing phenomenon of cross-cultural choreographic collaborations is also presented as a factor which lies at the heart of contemporary choreography's attractiveness with African youths who are keen to participate in global culture on equal terms with their peers from elsewhere.

Chapter 8 concludes the book with remarks on the role of movement and imagination in the fashioning of urban livelihoods and identities in contemporary Senegal as well as among the growing Senegalese Diaspora. Throughout the book, all translations between English and French are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Notes

1. For comprehensive reviews of phenomenological approaches in anthropology, see for example Lock (1993) and Csordas (1999).
2. A pioneering experiment with the neuro-imaging of tango footwork suggests that dance is indeed a holistic activity, involving the 'integration of spatial pattern, rhythm, synchronization to external stimuli and whole-body coordination' (Brown, Martinez, and Parsons 2006). Also see the recent work on dance and neuroscience in Jola et al. (2011).
3. The 'Hottentot Venus' was a Khoisan woman named Saartjie Baartman, who was tragically paraded around European theatres and circuses between 1810 and 1816. Her life has been documented in several biographies (Holmes 2007; Crais and Scully 2008).
4. On world fairs and colonial exhibitions, see for example Greenhalgh (1988), Corbey (1993), Lindfors (1999), Bancel et al. (2004).
5. *Habbés* was the colonial name given to the Dogons of Mali.
6. See, for example, *Drums, Sand and Shostakovich* by Ken Glazebrook and Alla Kovgan, USA, 2002, 70 minutes; *Movement (R)evolution Africa (a story of an art form in four acts)* by Joan Frosch and Alla Kovgan, USA, 2007, 65 minutes; *Danse l'Afrique, Danse!* by Marion Stalens, France, 2012, 52 minutes.
7. On 26 September 2002, the *Joola* ferryboat linking Dakar to Ziguinchor capsized tragically, causing the death of nearly 2,000 people on board. For several years following this tragedy, the only way to travel between Dakar and Ziguinchor was by road or plane.
8. The Centre Culturel Blaise Senghor (CCBS) is one of the biggest sites in the network of state-owned cultural centres modelled on the former *centres culturels* built during colonial times to promote French language and culture. Most centres were built between the 1950s and the 1970s. The CCBS was built in 1977 with the support of UNESCO.